



Image from: [Coco Chanel at 79. Source: Hulton-Deutsch... in Encyclopedia of Leadership](#)

Summary Article: **Fashion**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Introduction When we talk about fashion, we generally think about famous **designers** such as Chanel or Versace, but the term fashion covers a huge range of different clothing and accessory styles, markets, and industries. In fact, it need not even refer to clothing or accessories. What is fashionable in one culture would often seem very out of place in another. Some occupations demand that workers wear a particular uniform and some workers adopt their own informal uniform. Fashion can also be used to emphasize rank or standing in the community. It can also emphasize a feeling of belonging to a particular group. Particular styles of dress are considered suitable for one group of people but not for another. For example, a kilt is acceptable for a teenage girl to wear, but not as acceptable for an older woman. It is acceptable for a man to wear a kilt but not a skirt, and a T-shirt and shorts is acceptable wear for participating in sport or on a summer day, but not in the office or in the middle of winter. We tend to make assumptions about people because of the way they are dressed. So although the basic purpose of clothing is to cover or enhance the body, what we wear sends out important signals to others about who we are and what we would like to be.

Modern fashion Today's fashions and fashion industry are very different to that of a thousand years ago or even a hundred years ago. In the past, fashion styles have been limited by what fabrics and dyes were available. In most of the world, but particularly in the Western world, the 20th century saw the most dramatic changes in fashion styles, and in particular those for women. It was World War I that had the most significant effect. During this time, the role of women in society changed dramatically, with many joining the workforce and taking a much more active role. As a consequence, clothing became much more adaptable and easier to wear. After World War I, fashions did become more feminine, but were not as restrictive as in the past, with shorter dresses and much simpler and more practical styles. The reign of the ankle-length skirt and the boned corset was finally at an end. Tubular-style low-waisted dresses became popular in the early 1920s followed by the more fitted suits and dresses. Men's dress was also becoming less formal, as was sportswear, which up until this point had covered much of the body.

It was World War II that brought about the next major change. As with the World War I, women were expected to take on all sorts of different work. Rationing and government regulations restricted the choice of clothes. To economize on labour and materials, 'austerity' limits were set on how much material could be used for each garment, even how many buttonholes and pockets were allowed. The end of World War II, and the 1950s, brought new life to the fashion industry. After the drab period of austerity, clothing became very stylish and mass production of artificial and synthetic fabrics brought cheaper, easier to care for fabrics to the mass market. Trousers became acceptable wear for women, and the blossoming 'rock and pop' music market began influencing a whole generation. Teddy boys with their drainpipe trousers and brothel-creeper shoes became a common image.

However, it was the 1960s when **street fashion** really took hold. Styles began to change for the first

time, and fashions for the younger generation led the way, as new dyes and further developments in the industry brought mass production of clothing and drip-dry, non-iron, bright fabrics onto the market. The wearing of jeans also became very popular and added to the range of casual clothing available for men. However, the miniskirt is perhaps the most famous image of the 1960s, with softer, more feminine clothing developing during the 1970s and 1980s. Fashion today is very individual. Different styles for different groups of people, and other influences, have taken over. The music industry still exerts a big influence, as does the media in general, and different groups have their own fashionable looks, for example skateboarding culture. Sports clothing has become a very big fashion influence, and with it the desire for clothing to have specific names. Styles are also influenced by fashion from previous decades. 1960s and 1970s fashion styles, like platform shoes, although much exaggerated, were influenced by styles of the 1930s and 1940s. Fashion styles from the 1960s and 1970s are proving very popular at the moment.

Fashion designers Fashion designers have always had the strongest influence on fashion, because it is their ideas that filter down to the mass market, often through exposure by music and media stars. Coco Chanel (1883–1971) had a great influence on fashion after both World War I and World War II. After World War I, women began to wear her elegant, simple styles and she is still famous for her ‘little black dress’ and her ‘Chanel suit’, which, revamped in tweed, became popular all over again after World War II. Although Chanel died in the 1970s, the company still continues with the designer Karl Lagerfeld at the helm. Whereas Chanel influenced fashion styles of the 1920s and 1950s, Mary Quant (1934–) was probably the most influential designer of the early 1960s. She brought low-priced, bright, and simple clothing to the young people of London by opening boutiques on the King's Road and Chelsea. Other designers began to follow and the King's Road, followed by Carnaby Street, became a mecca for the young and fashion conscious.

Whereas Mary Quant's clothing was synonymous with the simple daring styles of the 1960s, Zandra Rhodes (1940–) became famous in the 1970s for her floating, feminine dresses. She has a very individual style, both in her own appearance, having dyed her hair in vivid colours long before it became popular to do so, and her clothing, which often featured embroidered and printed chiffons and silks. In fact, she started her career as a textile designer and then began making clothes from her fabrics. She is now in the process of forming a Museum of Textiles and Fashion in London.

Vivienne Westwood (1941–) is another British designer who has had a great influence on the world of fashion. She opened her first London shop in 1971, which went through a series of image changes, selling controversial fashions for both men and women, including clothes with shocking slogans, safety pins and chains, and deliberately torn clothing. By the 1980s, she was designing satin bras for outerwear and her own versions of the Victorian hooped crinoline. She had her first Paris show in 1983 and is still a very prominent figure on the international fashion scene.

There are many other famous designers who have had an influence on the fashion industry, but only comparatively few make it to the top, and it would be easy to underestimate the influence of the hundreds of designers who design textiles and clothing for the mass market.

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